

Former military dictator wins Nigerian presidency

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Initial reports Tuesday indicated that the Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC) party has emerged as the victor in Nigeria's presidential elections, which took place over the weekend.

Buhari's apparent victory has been met with allegations of vote rigging by supporters of current President Goodluck Jonathan's People's Democratic Party (PDP), which has controlled Nigeria's government since the end of open military rule in 1999.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a federation of West African regimes that has organized regional military missions in league with Washington and the European powers, has given its stamp of approval to the elections and insisted that both sides accept the final vote tally.

The lead up to Saturday's elections was marked by sharp tensions between rival factions within the Nigerian elite and state, represented by Jonathan and Buhari respectively. At least 50 Nigerians were killed during the elections, according to the National Human Rights Commission. Balloting was also accompanied by fighting in the north between insurgents and government forces.

If confirmed, Buhari's ascendancy would represent a further extension of US political domination over Africa's wealthiest country and largest oil producer. Buhari received years of training from the US military, graduating from the US Army War College in 1980, before becoming military dictator of Nigeria in a 1983 military coup d'état that overthrew the government of President Shehu Shagari.

Buhari's military junta banned strikes and public protests in 1984, and empowered the security forces to carry out arbitrary arrests and detentions of civilians, including numerous intellectuals, politicized students

and journalists. To enforce these measures, Buhari's government issued the State Security Decree #2, which legalized indefinite detention of anyone considered a "security risk" by Nigeria's National Security Organization (NSO) secret police force.

While orchestrating mass repression against political opponents, Buhari implemented right-wing economic policies aimed at further impoverishing the population, including "austerity so severe it went beyond" the social cuts demanded as part of a loan offer extended by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to the new military regime, according to James Vreeland's *The International Monetary Fund: Politics of Conditional Lending*. The 1984 National Budget advanced by Buhari and his clique of officers included measures to slash the Shagari government's 1983 budget by 15 percent and roll back public sector employment.

There are clear indications that the Obama White House favors a transition from Jonathan to Buhari. During Buhari's campaign, the APC has reportedly relied on support from a consulting firm run by US President Barack Obama's former senior advisor and campaign manager David Axelrod.

In January 2015, Buhari was invited as the keynote speaker for a conference, "Countdown to Nigeria's 2015 Elections," held by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a ruling class think tank with close ties to the White House.

The increasingly friendly relations of the Jonathan government with China likely explain the recent growth of tensions between the Jonathan administration and the Obama administration, which is seeking to counter growing Chinese hegemony in Africa through military and political means. Chinese economic concessions in the country's massive oil sector include a 2010 \$23 billion contract signed by Jonathan with Chinese firms

for construction of several new oil and petrochemical facilities.

Apparently fearful of expanding US influence within Nigeria's military establishment, the Jonathan administration moved suddenly in late 2014 to cancel a US-sponsored program to train new Nigerian military units. US officials responded to the cancellation with public threats that Jonathan's policies were bringing US-Nigerian relations to an historic low.

Nigerian workers have been increasingly restive, with Nigeria's two main oil unions initiating and subsequently reigning in small scale strikes in September and December 2014. The industrial actions were orchestrated to let off steam among the workers and secure concessions for the union leaderships, which are "simply trying to force the government to pay them off and get a hefty Christmas present," according to sources cited by the BBC.

Nigerian oil has taken on increased significance in the context of the collapse of Libyan oil production, formerly the main rival to the Nigerian industry, which has fallen to some 10 percent of levels achieved prior to the 2011 US-NATO war against the Gaddafi regime.

Buhari's election comes as the US is ramping up military deployments and political interventions throughout West Africa and the continent as a whole. US Africa Command's (AFRICOM) commander General David Rodriguez recently called for a "huge" counterinsurgency campaign throughout West Africa, targeting a range of "extremist" groups.

US, French and other European military forces are engaged in joint operations with Chadian and other local militaries in the Sahel, Mali and Central Africa, including the invasion of portions of northeastern Nigeria by a US-backed Chadian force in mid-March 2015 and the French-led imperialist invasion of Mali in 2013. Along with a slate of other local forces, including some 8,000 troops from Niger, Cameroon and Benin affiliated with the newly formed African Union (AU) Multi-National Joint Task Force, Chad's government and military are serving as a leading proxy force on behalf US and European imperialism in the region.

US backing for the Buhari campaign is part of US efforts to secure control over the massive oil resources flowing through Nigeria's export terminals along the Gulf of Guinea. As early as 2001, the Bush administration's National Energy Policy Development

Group, headed by Vice President Dick Cheney, concluded that control of Nigerian oil and drilling developments in the Gulf of Guinea were critical to US interests.

The US military and elite US think tanks have since developed plans for militarily occupying and controlling Lagos, home to some 20 million Nigerians. Papers published in 2014 specifically citing Lagos as a necessary focus for US contingency planning included "Megacities and the United States Army: Preparing for a complex and uncertain future," published by the US Army's Strategic Studies Group, and "Mega Cities, Ungoverned Areas, and the Challenge of Army Urban Combat Operations in 2030-2040," published by the Small Wars Foundation.

Saturday's elections were the culmination of a struggle between different factions of a national bourgeois elite, with both sides equally hostile to Nigeria's workers, oppressed masses and peasantry. Jonathan and Buhari alike represent a Nigerian ruling class that is completely dependent upon foreign capital and incapable of implementing even limited measures to raise the living standards of the population.

Buhari's rise comes as yet further proof that Africa's "democratic" and "independent" governments, established through "decolonization" and plagued by a never-ending series of military coups, are to be further transformed into colonial-style garrison states in service of the US and European banks and corporations.



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